

**IBN ḤAZM
ON THE DOCTRINE OF TAHRĪF**

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of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to make a critical assessment of the Muslim doctrine of tahrīf (the charge that the Jews and Christians corrupted their divine scriptures) via its most vociferous protagonist, the Spanish Muslim scholar, Abū Muḥammad ‘Ali Ibn Ḥazm (d.1064). The dissertation uses Ibn Ḥazm’s monumental five volume work, al-Fiṣal Fī al-Milal Wa al-Ahwā Wa al-Niḥal (An Analysis of World Religious Communities, Ideologies and Sects) as the primary source of reference. It consists of an introduction of four chapters and a conclusion.

In the Introduction the diverse Muslim positions on the doctrine of tahrīf as well as the serious implications it has for the Muslim-Jewish-Christian dialogue is highlighted.

Chapter One provides an account of the psychological as well as the socio-political factors which may have influenced Ibn Ḥazm’s aggressive theology on Jews and Christians in general, and their scriptures (the Torah and the Gospels) in particular.

Chapter Two deals directly with Ibn Ḥazm’s elaboration on the doctrine of tahrīf. It notes the vituperative nature of Ibn Ḥazm’s claim of tahrīf al-naṣṣ, and more particularly lays bare the four basic theological premises underpinning his confutation of the Judeo-Christian scriptures. A few significant examples of contradictions which Ibn Ḥazm finds within the Torah and Gospels are presented. The chapter concludes by making a brief critical assessment of Jewish and Christian responses to Ibn Ḥazm.

Chapter Three attempts to critique Ibn Ḥazm’s emphatic and literal reading of the Qur’ānic verses pertaining to tahrīf, by situating it within the context of the ambivalent and opposing conclusions reached by two classical commentators, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabari (d.923) and Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzi (d.1209).

Chapter Four examines a number of novel and creative attempts by modern scholars to go beyond traditional conceptions and debates on the doctrine of tahrīf.

The dissertation concludes by arguing that modern "theologies of revelation" do provide us with a way out of the impasse that the debate on tahrīf has reached.

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

This is a textual study of Ibn Ḥazm's kitāb al-Fiṣal fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā wa al-Niḥal. The significance of the text has been recognized by many scholars.

The text of al-Fiṣal employed in his study was the 1980 Beirut edition and the 1982 Saudi edition. All translations of the text were originally done.

Ibn Ḥazm's views on the Muslim doctrine of tahrīf were compared and contrasted with that of two classical Muslim scholars, al-Ṭabari (d.923) and al-Rāzi (d.1209).

Ibn Ḥazm's notion of revelation, which informs his views on tahrīf were placed in a cross-cultural context and critiqued by employing notions of revelations which are derived from the Abrahamic faiths.

INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental doctrines of the Islamic faith is the belief that the Qur'ān is the Word of God (Kalām Allah) revealed to Prophet Muḥammad. But the Qur'ān itself confirms that it is not the only Word of God, and that the true Muslim is characterized by the belief that God sent many prophets before Muḥammad and spoke to them as He spoke to him:

"Say (O Muslims): We believe in God, and in that which has been revealed to us, and that which was revealed unto Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and their tribal descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus, and that which has been vouchsafed to all the (other) Prophets by their Lord; We make no distinction between any of them" (2:136). (1)

The Qur'ān uses the following three generic terms, kutub, (2:285), ṣuḥuf (87:18,19) and zūbur (26:196) when it refers to all of God's revelation taken together, but specifically names two of these prior revelations, the Tawrāt (5:44) and the Injīl (5:46). Although the Qur'ān at no point explicitly attributes the Tawrāt to Moses, as it does of the Injīl to Jesus (57:27), it is universally accepted among commentators of the Qur'ān that the Tawrāt referred to in the Qur'ān is the name of the divine revelation sent down to Moses.

(1) All translations of Qur'anic verses are based on that of Muḥammad Asad's "Message of the Qur'ān".

The Qur'ān repeatedly insists that it confirms earlier revelations, since all of them have emanated from a single original text known as the 'Mother of the Book' (Umm al-Kitāb, 13:39) which is preserved with God 'upon a well-guarded tablet' (lawh mahfūz, 85:22). The Qur'ān furthermore claims to be a guardian (muhaymin) over earlier revelations (5:48).

So entrenched has the doctrine of the historical continuity of revelation become within the Islamic faith, that it is generally accepted that a rejection of this doctrine is tantamount to a rejection of Islam itself (Idris 1977:15). This inclusive theological standpoint has led Faruqi to propose that Islām is unique. "For no religion in the world has yet made belief in the truth of other religions a necessary condition to its own faith and witness" (Faruqi 1986:191).

Notwithstanding this open theological position on Divine truth and revelation in other religions; the Muslim attitude towards the extant Jewish and Christian scriptures can hardly be described as being positive, as the following quotation vividly illustrates:

"Just as the Taurāt is not the Old Testament, or the Pentateuch, as now received by the Jews and Christians, so the Injīl mentioned in the Qur'an is certainly not the New Testament, and it is not the four Gospels, as now received by the Christian Church, but an original Gospel which was promulgated by Jesus as the Taurāt was promulgated by Moses and the Qur'ān by Muḥammad Al-Mustafa." (2)

- (2) The above quotation comes from an official Saudi approved English translation of the Qur'ān, p. 33, and represents the popular view among Muslims.

The fundamental cause of this ambivalence in the Muslim attitude towards the Judaeo-Christian scriptures is to be found in their adherence to the doctrine of tahrīf. In terms of this doctrine the followers of earlier revelations, in particular the Jews and Christians, are accused of having altered or corrupted the original scriptures. This doctrine of scriptural distortion has meant that the extant Torah and Bible hardly meant anything to Muslims. The doctrine also had profound implications for Muslim-Jewish-Christian polemics.(3)

Early Muslim scholars found a basis for this doctrine in certain verses of the Qur'ān. Disparate interpretations of these verses as well as divergent ecumenical experiences led Muslim scholars to formulate the doctrine of tahrīf quite differently. Certainly the most popular view was that there had been a wholesale corruption of the texts of the Torah and the four Gospels [tahrīf al-naṣṣ]. Some other scholars, like al-Ghazāli (d. 1111) however, took the view that it was not the text itself but rather the interpretation of the text that had been corrupted [tahrīf al-ma'ānī]. A middle position also emerged which held that only some portions of the text had been altered, while the remaining authentic portion was misinterpreted. (4)

(3) John Wansborough has judged it the theme "destined to bear the major burden of Muslim external polemic" (Wansborough 1978:41).

(4) For a fuller picture on the earlier Muslim scholars' views on tahrīf, see Utomo 1982.

In his most recent book 'Muslim-Christian Encounters', one of the last Orientalist giants, Professor William Montgomery Watt bemoans the fact that; "There has so far been no detailed study of the way in which this doctrine of corruption was elaborated" [Watt 1991:33].

This dissertation will attempt to contribute towards filling this apparent gap in Islamic research. It will attempt to do this by examining more closely the manner in which the doctrine of tahrīf was developed and expounded by the most celebrated Muslim comparativist, 'Ali Ibn Ḥazm [d. 1064]. This versatile Spanish Muslim scholar has been described as 'the first textual critic of the Old and the New Testament' [Faruqi, 1986:98]. Moreover, Ibn Ḥazm is widely recognized in the literature as the foremost advocate of tahrīf al-naṣṣ - the view that the text of the original Tawrāt and Injīl were 'adulterated almost beyond recognition' by the Jews and Christians [Chejne 1982:121].

In order to provide a comparative perspective of Ibn Ḥazm's position of tahrīf al-naṣṣ, we shall contrast it with that of two classical Muslim exegetes [mufassirūn] of the Qu'rān, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabari [d. 923] and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzi [d. 1209].

Our study shall conclude with a critical examination of contemporary research in the field of comparative theology of revelation. Our critical line of enquiry here will be to see whether there is a way out of the current impasse, that the debate on tahrīf has reached.

CHAPTER ONE

IBN HAZM'S SECTARIAN MILIEU

A number of detailed studies on the life and work of Ibn Ḥazm has been produced over the last few years.(5) It is not our purpose here to regurgitate that material but rather, in consonance with the specific line of inquiry of this study, to attempt to introduce Ibn Ḥazm via an identification of some of the more important factors which may have played a role in the shaping of his aggressive polemics against Jews and Christians in general and their sacred scriptures in particular.

A. A PROFILE OF IBN HAZM

Abū Muḥammad 'Alī Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Sa'īd Ibn Ḥazm was born in Cordova in 994 AD. He died at Manta Lishām (located in present day Portugal) in 1064. During the seventy years of his life, Ibn Ḥazm established himself as one of the foremost intellectual giants not only of Muslim Spain, but of the entire Muslim world (Chejne 1982: 1).

'Alī Ibn Ḥazm was born to an influential pro-Umayyad family. His politically astute father, Aḥmad's, powerful position within the administrative hierarchy of the Muslim rulers of Spain meant that he could provide his son 'Alī with a distinguished education in religious sciences, literature and poetry.

(5) For more recent studies on the life and work of Ibn Ḥazm see: A.G. Chejne's IBN HAZM (1982) and M. Abu Layla's IN PURSUIT OF VIRTUE (1990)

Ibn Ḥazm's pampered and easy life within court-circles was however to last for only fifteen years. With the fall of the Caliph Hishām II in 1009, his father was expelled from his office and palace in the government complex of al-Zāhirah.

The family's fortunes began to change drastically. From here on Ibn Ḥazm's life is a reflection of this calamitous period in Andalusian history. For the next two decades no less than nine different caliphs emerged amidst bloody revolts, destruction of life and property, which shook the very foundations of Andalusian society. W. Montgomery Watt has described the years from 1008 to 1031 as the most tragic quarter centuries in the history of Muslim Spain (Watt 1965:84).

After the death of Ibn Ḥazm's father in 1012 and the destruction of the family home at Balāt Mughīth, he was forced to take refuge in Almeria. Ibn Ḥazm revelled in the relative intellectual atmosphere and religious freedom of Almeria. He engaged most of the great scholars who had congregated in Almeria in heated debate and discussion. Among them were a Jewish scholar by the name of Samual ibn Nagrella (Abu Layla 1983:9).

Three years later in 1016 he was imprisoned for some months and then banished after being suspected of carrying out pro-Umayyad propoganda. This time he sought refuge in a place called Ḥusn al-Qasr.

After spending six years in exile, Ibn Ḥazm decided to return to his city of birth, Cordova, in 1019 and dedicate himself to his studies. He was destined to play a high profile political role on one last occasion. After his return to Cordova some time between 1027 - 1029, he was enticed to take up political office once more under the last Umayyad Caliph, Hishām al-Mu'tadd. The overthrowing of al-Mu'tadd in 1031 marked the official end of the caliphate of Cordova. The thirty towns of Muslim Spain was now each ruled by independant rulers, and thus this period came to be known as the era of the party kings or reyes de taifos, (Arabic - Mulūk at-tawāif).

The official collapse of the Umayyad Caliphate had destroyed the loyalist ideals of 'Ali ibn Ḥazm. From now on, he abandoned his frustrating political career and began dedicating himself to intellectual work and study, to writing his books and teaching.

Now in his sixties, Ibn Ḥazm decided to retire to his family estate at Manta Lishām. Here he spent the last years of his life writing and teaching. He died in 1064, leaving an extensive and unequalled literary legacy of works and thoughts which continue to impact his succeeding generations.

B. COMPARATIVE RELIGION: AN INTEGRAL DIMENSION OF IBN HAZM'S SCHOLARSHIP

Abū Muḥammad 'Alī Ibn Ḥazm was a versatile scholar whose interest spanned a large spectrum of the intellectual disciplines of medieval Spain. He was a jurist, belle-lettriste, poet, theologian, philosopher, historian, ethicist and a scholar of comparative religion all combined into one. In a profound sense then Ibn Ḥazm represents the integrationist and multi-disciplinary scholar of early Islam.

'Alī ibn Ḥazm was also one of the most prolific writers in the history of Islamic literature. According to his son, Abū Rāf'ī Al-Faḍl (478/1086), his father left about 400 volumes comprising an estimated 80,000 pages on a variety of subjects (Chejne 1982:10). Chejne has produced a valuable annotated list of 137 works which have been attributed to Ibn Ḥazm (ibid., pp 301-313).

In the light of the sheer breadth of his scholarship, it becomes extremely difficult to isolate one specific area which can be described as Ibn Ḥazm's forte. Notwithstanding this limitation, Ibn Ḥazm has become renowned (and perhaps notorious) for his work in the field of comparative religion. Faruqi has described him as the greatest comparativist before modern times (Faruqi 1982:98). Orientalist scholars, like W. Montgomery Watt and James Sweetman are not convinced of the originality of Ibn Ḥazm's contribution to the field of comparative religion. They vehemently dispute the proposition that Ibn Ḥazm produced the world's first treatise on comparative religion. For them the sum

total of Ibn Ḥazm's contribution was anti Judaeo-Christian polemics (Abu Layla 1985(b):165).

Whether one agrees with the comparative theological postulates of Ibn Ḥazm or not, the fact remains that no serious student of comparative religion and more particular, Muslim-Jewish-Christian polemics can afford to ignore the work of this eleventh century Spanish Muslim scholar.

His book al-Fiṣal fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā wa al-Niḥal (AN ANALYSIS OF WORLD RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS, IDEOLOGIES AND SECTS) with which this study is concerned is encyclopaedic in range and stands out as his magnum opus and undoubtedly his major contribution to the field of comparative religion. K. al-Fiṣal also "stands as one of the most systematic and earliest works on the history of religious ideas" (Aasi 1987:29). Through al-Fiṣal, Ibn Ḥazm attempted to deal critically with all of the known religious and worldviews of his time, from an Islamic vantage point. Moreover, al-Fiṣal also deals with divisions and sects within the house of Islam. In particular the theology of the M'utazilites, the Ash'arites and the heterodoxies of the Shi'ites (Friedlander 1909:19). Friedlander claims that the originality of his (Ibn Ḥazm's) minds shows itself in the very design of al-Fiṣal (ibid). In al-Fiṣal, Ibn Ḥazm develops a typology of six categories of world religions and worldviews other than Islām (al-Fiṣal :3). Naturally, Christianity and Judaism and their variety of sects and schisms dominates the

pages of al-Fiṣal. Other religious which are discussed in al-Fiṣal are:

1. The religious traditions of Mesopotamia and Persia: Sabians, Zoroastrions and Manicheons.
2. Religions traditions of India and the Far East : Brahmans, Hindus, Buddhists and what Ibn Ḥazm describes as al-Tanāsukh (the transmigration of souls).

The precise date at which al-Fiṣal was written is not known, but internal evidence seems to suggest that this encyclopaedic work was produced over a lengthy period. The Andalusian mystic Ibn al-'Arabi described al-Fiṣal as consisting of six volumes. The extant version of this work however consists of five volumes (Abu Layla 1983:14).

K. al-Fiṣal which was first translated into Spanish by Miguel Asin Palacios between 1927 - 1932, and large portions of it later into English by James Windrow Sweetman, has recently been the subject of a number of academic studies (Sweetman:1945). In 1983, Muḥammad Abu Layla, an Egyptian scholar submitted a doctoral thesis to the University of Exeter (England) entitled "The Muslim View of Christianity With Special Reference to the Work of Ibn Ḥazm." A few years later his wife, Nurshif A.R. Rif'at also submitted a doctoral thesis to the same University, entitled "Ibn Ḥazm on Jews and Judaism." Both these theses used al-Fiṣal as primary source and basis for their research. Both also produced more authentic translations of the relevant portions of al-Fiṣal.

A more comprehensive thesis on Ibn Ḥazm's al-Fiṣal was however done by a Pakistani scholar, Ghulam Haider Aasi at Temple University (U.S.A.) in 1987. Aasi's thesis whilst being less profound in its detailed examination of Ibn Ḥazm's views on Christianity and Judaism, has the merit of situating Ibn Ḥazm's al-Fiṣal within the genre of Muslim literature known as al-Milal wa al-Niḥal (Muslim Comparative Studies of World Religious Traditions and Philosophical Ideologies).

My dissertation also focusses primarily on Ibn Ḥazm's al-Fiṣal, with particular reference to his exposition of the doctrine of tahrīf.

C. IBN ḤAZM'S DISPUTED GENEALOGY

Abū Muḥammad 'Alī Ibn Ḥazm's genealogy has been the subject of heated dispute among contemporary scholars. Early Muslim biographers have tended to support the genealogy given by Ibn Ḥazm himself, which claims that he was a sixth generation descendant of Yazid, a native of Persia, who had converted to Islam as a client of the Umayyad Yazīd ibn Abī Sufyān. Orientalist scholars have on the other hand invoked the genealogy produced by Ibn Ḥazm's contemporary Ibn Ḥayyān (d. 1076), who is the only one to have claimed that the Banu Ḥazm were descendants of a humble Spanish Christian family.(6)

(6) Our information on Ibn Ḥazm's genealogy has been based on Aasi's thesis. He has consulted no less than ten "Historical and Biographical Dictionaries of the Learned Men in Muslim History". For full list see (Aasi 1987:70)

It is not our purpose here to critically examine which genealogy has greater authenticity, which we believe has already been adequately dealt with elsewhere. However, the Spanish genealogy leads us to point to some rather interesting conclusions. These conclusions point to a powerful psychological process at work in motivating Ibn Ḥazm's polemics against Christianity.

In order to fully appreciate the sensitivity of the question of genealogy within the Andalusian context and therefore the important role it must have occupied within the consciousness of Ibn Ḥazm, it is necessary to have some background understanding to the peculiar religio-cultural and ethnic milieu of Muslim Spain.

Ibn Ḥazm's birth at the close of the tenth century came when Muslim Spain was at its finest hour. Arab religio-political hegemony over Spanish society had completed almost three centuries and its influence was felt almost everywhere. Muslim rule had resulted in the flight of the Visigothic Christian nobility to the mountains in the north, and the ethnicity of al-Andalus began to develop contours along the lines of Muslims as a controlling group, neo-Muslims as aspirants to the system in power, and non-Muslims as the underclass (Aasi 1987:2).

The Iberian peninsula which consisted of a vast portion of Spain and a small part of present day Portugal, was invaded by some twenty thousand Arab and Berber Muslims in 710 AD. The Muslim strength gradually increased through a process of miscegenation.

This resulted in the emergence of a vibrant new class known as the Muwalladūn. The latter were born Muslims of either Arab or Berber fathers who had married Spanish women. They were disparagingly referred to as "renegades" by Spanish Christians.

Yet another important social development was that of the large scale conversion of a number of Spanish Christians to Islām, more particularly during the middle two quarters of the tenth century.(7) Some of the conversions were the result of religious convictions, but the vast majority was for socio-economic and political reasons (ibid).

With the passing of time the Muwalladūn and the neo-Muslims came to make up the largest number within Andalusian society. Notwithstanding these developments, there were still many Christians who did not convert and often an indigenous Christian or Jewish woman who was married to a Muslim man, continued to practise her own religion. Likewise, many in the Jewish community of Spain preserved their religion (Aasi 1987:3). According to Chejne, the distinction between the three diverse constituents of the Muslim community might have become blurred at some point in history, but was never entirely forgotten (Chejne 1974:51-52). Such then was the religio-cultural and ethnic context of Muslim Spain at the time of Ibn Ḥazm.

(7) Aasi (1987:3) claims that approximately eighty percent of the indigenous population of large areas of Spain converted to Islam.

The Dutch scholar, Reinhart Dozy, argues that the family of Ibn Ḥazm was Christian until the time of his great grandfather Ḥazm, and that the family was ashamed of its Christian origin and claimed a Persian ancestry (Dozy 1978 : 575 ff). The English Orientalist, Professor R.A. Nicholson, is even more blunt when he claims that Ibn Ḥazm came of a renegade family, but he was so far from honouring his Christian ancestors that he pretended to trace his descent to a Persian freedman of Yazīd ibn Abī Sufyān. In fact, at the end of the same passage, Nicholson says something extremely revealing;

'...and his (Ibn Ḥazm's) contempt for Christianity was in proportion to his fanatical zeal on behalf of Islām.'
(Nicholson 1988:426)

Both Dozy and Nicholson believe that Ibn Ḥazm willfully fictionalized his genealogy in order to deny his Christian ancestry. And the reason why he did this was because of his bigotrous feeling of arrogance and contempt for the Christian religion. If their theory were assumed to be correct, it would lead us to the conclusion that Ibn Ḥazm had a deep inner psychic motivation to undermine Christianity. In terms of this theory, therefore, there existed a powerful subjective factor which fuelled Ibn Ḥazm's polemical approach in his writings on Christianity.

D. ISLAMIC SPAIN'S INTERFAITH MILIEU

In this section we shall broadly describe the interfaith relations that characterized Muslim Spain with a view to identifying possible socio-political influences on the comparative theological perspectives of Ibn Ḥazm.

With the Muslim conquest of Southern Spain, the region was plunged into an short period of internal turbulence and attempts at external expansion. This period of unrest was brought to an end during the rule of Abdurahmān I, popularly known as the Falcon of Andalus (756-788 AD). Under his rule the ravaging power politics of the feuding tribes was brought to a halt, and the expansionists aims of the Muslims which had received a decisive blow at the famous Battle of Tours in 732 AD, was effectively quelled.

The rule of the Falcon of Andalus ushered in a period of great prosperity and cultural achievements in Muslim Spain. This golden age of Islamic Spain was to last for more than 200 years. The intense acrimony and interreligious rivalry which had accompanied the Muslim conquest of Spain had somewhat subsided among the non-Muslim subjects of Andalusia during this period. The Jews who had been severely persecuted by the Christians on the eve of the Muslim invasion of Spain, now grew in numbers and flourished.

The following description of their position is described by Humes' Spanish People:

Side by side with the new rulers lived the Christians and Jews in peace. The latter, rich with commerce and industry, were content to let the memory of their oppression by the priest-ridden Goths sleep, now that the prime authors of it had disappeared. Learned in all the arts and sciences, cultured and tolerant, they were treated by the Moors with marked respect, and multiplied exceedingly all over Spain; and, like the Christian Spaniards under Moorish rule - who were called Mozarabes had cause to thank their new masters for an era of prosperity such as they had never known before (Quoted in Irving 1973:72).

This is the kind of tolerance that characterized this early period of Islamic Spain. Of course there were incidents of Muslim bigotry which suggests that the opposite might have been true. These isolated incidents however need to be viewed both within their socio-historical context and in relation to the interfaith experiences of Spain and the rest of the world at that time. The early nineteenth century historian E. Gibbon confirms that it was a time of tranquillity and justice. The Christians were never compelled to renounce the Bible or to embrace the Qur'ān (Gibbon 1823:IV, 153).

In order to balance the rather generalized picture of the interreligious life of ninth and tenth century Spain we have thusfar sketched, it needs to be pointed out that throughout this period the threat of a possible Christian re-conquest from the outside always loomed large in the consciousness of the Muslims of Spain. Moreover, the fact that Andalusia was a frontier province of the Islamic Caliphate deeply influenced the Muslim religious outlook in general and their interfaith perspective in particular.

Their frontier location produced a defensive theology. Chejne has described the posture of Andalusians' attitude towards issues affecting religious belief and practice as being one of ultra-conservatism. Chejne furthermore argues that the Andalusian pietists considered themselves for a long time the gaurdians of an unadulterated orthodoxy (Chejne 1984:57). Against such a background it was natural that Spanish Muslim theological perspectives vis a vis other religions was extremely antagonistic

and polemical. Such seems to have been the case with Ibn Ḥazm.

If one adds to the picture we have thusfar sketched, the severe political crisis Muslim Spain was experiencing during much of Ibn Ḥazm's adult life, and his own beleaguered attempts at salvaging the crumbling Umayyad Caliphate, then Ibn Ḥazm's crusading scholarship might well be described as a case of transposing enemies. Could it be that the Jews and Christians were attacked by Ibn Ḥazm as a direct consequence of his extreme disappointment and frustration at the collapse of the Umayyad Caliphate? Whose demise ironically had far more internal causes than remote external ones.

E. IBN ḤAZM'S INTERFAITH ENCOUNTERS

During Ibn Ḥazm's exile in Almeria in the year 1013 AD, he met up with a fellow Jewish Cordovian, Samuel ibn Nagrella, who had also sought refuge in Almeria. The two engaged in heated debates much of which revolved around the question of the authenticity of each others scriptures (Powers 1986:101). These debates must have left an indelible impact on Ibn Ḥazm for he painstakingly relates these debates in fascinating detail in al-Fiṣal.

Abu Layla believes it was these interfaith debates in Almeria which influenced Ibn Ḥazm's detailed investigation of the scriptures of the Jews and Christians (Abu Layla 1990:37).

This theory seems to find support in the fact that when many years later, Ibn Nagrella who now emboldened by his new and prestigious position as vizier of Granada, audaciously composed a treatise in which he pointed out alleged contradictions and errors in the Muslim sacred scripture, the Glorious Qur'ān. Ibn Ḥazm felt compelled to produce a refutation of it, entitled, Radd 'alā ibn Nagrella al-Yahūdi (Powers 1986:110). Ibn Ḥazm's refutation was however not merely limited to a defense of the integrity and authenticity of the Glorious Qur'ān, but also a counter-attack in which he moves from a specific attack on Ibn Nagrella to a general attack on Judaism, listing numerous "abominations", (oddities), and 'lies' found in the Torah, Psalms, Talmud and other sacred writings of the Jews (ibid). Through this treatise, Ibn Ḥazm reaffirms his support and elaboration of the nascent Muslim doctrine of tahrīf. In his case it is the contention that the Jews have corrupted and distorted their scriptures. A theme which Ibn Ḥazm was to develop more fully in al-Fiṣal.

Ibn Nagrella's contribution to Ibn Ḥazm's vigorous pursuit of the theme of tahrīf cannot be overemphasized. For Ibn Ḥazm was a keen debator who took his opponents seriously, moreso if they were as audacious as ibn Nagrella. There have been numerous examples in history of individual Muslim polemicists having been inspired into their exclusivist rhetoric by a feeling of compulsion to counter-act a perceived attack on their own cherished religious doctrines. The contemporary South African Muslim polemicist, Mr. Ahmad Deedat, is most certainly an ideal

example. Ibn Ḥazm provides us with a succinct example of this.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the course of this chapter on the life of ibn Ḥazm, we have persistently attempted to search for factors which may have influenced, directly or indirectly, Ibn Ḥazm's aggressive theology on Jews and Christians in general, and their scriptures, the Torah and the Injīl in particular.

We have explored a possible psychological process at work in the theory concerning Ibn Ḥazm's alleged denial of his Christian genealogy. A similar process was alluded to in our proposition that Ibn Ḥazm's polemics against Jews and Christians, might have been a case of substituting the real enemy, his anti-Ummayyad persecutors, for an illusory external enemy.

The defensive and ultra conservative theological postures of Andalusian Muslims, it was argued, could be attributed to geopolitical realities. Their frontier location made the elite Spanish Muslims to close ranks against an external Christian European enemy, which loomed large in their consciousness, even during times of detente. Ibn Ḥazm was probably the most outstanding product of this defensive theological milieu.

Last but not least, we examined an interfaith encounter which we believe had a profound impact on the theological sensitivity of Ibn Ḥazm. This as well as other exchanges with non-Muslims were of great significance to his writings, especially al-Fiṣal, where

he could use first hand experience of Jewish and Christian thought to give force to his arguments. It was these heated debates which must have ignited Ibn Ḥazm's polemical passions. The results of all of these we believe are the counter refutations of the Torah and the Gospels continued in Ibn Ḥazm's al-Fiṣal.

CHAPTER TWO

IBN-ḤAZM'S ELABORATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF TAHRĪF

The eleventh century Spanish scholar, Abū Muḥammad 'Alī Ibn Ḥazm is the most renowned representative of those classical Muslim scholars who have elaborated upon, and argued in favour of the doctrine of tahrīf al-naṣṣ (i.e. the charge that Jews and the Christians are guilty of having corrupted and altered the text of their divine scriptures, the Torah and the Gospels). This is usefully illustrated in F. Buhl's contribution on 'tahrīf' in the Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, R. Caspar and J.M. Gaudeul's choice of a traditional Muslim text concerning tahrīf al-naṣṣ (Islamo 6, 1980:78), as well as in the research findings on 'tahrīf' by a French Muslim-Christian Research Group. ('The Challenge of the Scriptures', 1980:79) Furthermore, Utomo argues that:

Ibn Ḥazm offers us the most devastating example of the allegation that Biblical scriptures in the hands of Jews and Christians are full of inaccuracies both of historical and geographical fact, and of theological doctrine.
(Utomo 1982:42)

All of the above scholars have identified 'Alī Ibn Ḥazm as the most prominent and important example of classical Muslim scholars who have championed the view of tahrīf al-naṣṣ.

But how exactly has Ibn Ḥazm obtained this status? On what theological basis does he make his claim of tahrīf al-naṣṣ? And how does he set about substantiating his claim? These are some of the key questions that we shall attempt to address in the course of this chapter.

THE VITUPERATIVE AND EMPHATIC NATURE OF IBN HAZM'S
CLAIM OF TAHRĪF AL-NASS

One of the reasons why Ibn Ḥazm acquired his status as one of the foremost advocates of tahrīf al-nass is the strong and definitive manner in which he makes the claim. In fact, quite often Ibn-Ḥazm's discourse on tahrīf ends on a strong vituperative note. For example, at the conclusion of his argument in which he refutes the Jewish claim that the Pentateuch was the Divine word of God, Ibn Ḥazm describes the 'real' author of the Pentateuch in the following invective language: "The bull is more discreet than he, and the jackass wiser" (Young 1985:141). Ibn Ḥazm also revilingly describes the historical accounts contained in the Talmud and the Bible as "laughable jokes which are useful only to console the sad one and to dissipate melancholy" (Chejne, 1982:53).

While such perjorative and vile language would no doubt not go down well with Christian and Jewish theologians as well as with the more academically oriented religious scholars, it has a great appeal among the more polemically motivated Muslim masses. Ironically therefore, the weakness in Ibn Ḥazm's discourse on tahrīf, is also at the same time its strongest attraction.

Ibn Ḥazm is emphatic about his claim that the Jews and Christians are guilty of having deliberately corrupted and altered their divine scriptures. In his view the extent of this alteration of the actual text of their scriptures (tahrīf al-nass) was of such a general and wholesale nature, that he believes it would not be

correct, in anyway whatsoever, to equate the books which Jews and Christians currently possess and call the Torah and the Gospels, with the original divine revelations sent down to them from God.

This emphatic position is given to us right at the outset of Ibn Ḥazm's discussion on the subject of tahrīf in his K. al-Fiṣal. In fact Ibn Ḥazm's discussion of it is announced by an unequivocal headline which reads as follows:-

Concerning the manifest contradictions and clear falsifications in the book the Jews call the Torah, and the rest of their books, as well as in the four gospels, confirming thereby their alteration and corruption, such that it is other than that which Allah, The Sublime, revealed to them (K. al-Fiṣal, I, 116).

Moreover, from the very first sentence Ibn Ḥazm leaves his readers in no doubt as to his views. He is going to show the untruth contained in the books of Jews and Christians in such a manner that no intelligent person will have any doubt at all that these books are the compilations of learned men, and that they have not been very successful with their fabrications, because they have calumniated Allah, the angels and the prophets (ibid, see also Sweetman 1945: Part 2, Vol. I, p. 262).

What does one make of such an emphatic position on the contentious subject of tahrīf? Orientalist and non-Muslim scholars have denounced Ibn Ḥazm's 'extreme' position on tahrīf as being one of 'anti Judaeo-Christian polemics' (Watt 1991:65), and 'of beating the air' (Sweetman, op.cit.). Abu Layla however

points out that "all Muslim scholars are united in their praise of his (Ibn Ḥazm's) criticisms of Christianity and Judaism" (Abu Layla 1985:75). Abu Layla's position does reflect the majority position within the Muslim community. By and large Muslim scholars would not yield to the criticism that Ibn Ḥazm is guilty of intellectual arrogance in raising such an emphatic claim of tahrīf al-naṣṣ against the Jews and Christians. Rather, they would argue that Ibn Ḥazm's emphatic position on tahrīf al-naṣṣ is a clear case of intellectual confidence.

IBN ḤAZM'S DUAL APPROACH IN HIS CONFUTATION OF THE TORAH AND GOSPEL

Muslims have used two kinds of evidence to substantiate their claims of tahrīf. The first and more crucial evidence has been that of invoking certain key verses from the Qur'ān. A second kind of evidence that has been marshalled in support of the claim of tahrīf are expositions of perceived "contradictions", "errors" and "inconsistencies" contained in the Torah and Gospels. The former evidence has predominated over that of the latter, for a number of reasons. Chief among these has been the fact that the Qur'ān itself claimed that it came to confirm the true and original message contained in the Torah and the Gospels, while at the same time superceding them (5:48).

If the Judaeo-Christian scriptures has been distorted and further, if the Qur'ān contains the pure and unadulterated versions of the biblical narratives, why bother to read the Judaeo-Christian version? This was the logic which predominated

within Muslim circles. Moreover, the fact that the Judaeo-Christian scriptures were written in Hebrew, a foreign language with which very few Muslims were familiar, contributed further to the Muslim disregard for the Old Testament (Powers 1986:109). Against such a backdrop it was natural that Muslim confutations of the Torah and the Gospels employing the latter approach were rare and invariably superficial.

A notable exception is the case of 'Ali Ibn Ḥazm. Ibn Ḥazm not only employed both approaches in his confutation of the Torah and the Gospels, but was particularly thorough in marshalling evidence from the Old and New Testaments in substantiating his claim of tahrīf al-naṣṣ. All of Ibn Ḥazm's retractors, even the most vociferous ones are forced to acknowledge that he must have had a first hand knowledge of the contents of the Old and New Testaments. David Powers for example argues that Ibn Ḥazm must have had 'access to several Arabic translations of the Old Testament and did not rely on any single one of them' (Powers 1986:120). Sweetman is even more explicit in expressing his admiration for Ibn Ḥazm's first hand acquaintance with the Old and New Testaments as expressed in the following passage:

He (Ibn Ḥazm) seems to have had considerable equipment for the task in which he employed himself. He had a knowledge of various translations of the Old Testament and the New. He knew the divergences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew. He gives evidence also of first-hand contact with Jewish scholars, from whom he has quite obviously obtained some knowledge of the Talmud and rabbinical learning (Moon:67).

Even Watt reluctantly acknowledges that "it is clear that Ibn Ḥazm had a fuller knowledge of many Christian matters" than his predecessors (Watt 1991:66).

FOUR BASIC THEOLOGICAL PREMISES UNDERPINNING IBN ḤAZM'S CONFUTATION OF THE TORAH AND THE GOSPELS

Ibn Ḥazm argues on the basis of four theological premises rooted within the Islamic tradition that the Jews and Christians are guilty of having corrupted their divinely revealed scriptures (tahrīf al-naṣṣ). Firstly, Ibn Ḥazm does not deny that God revealed the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai, or that Jesus had received from God a Qur'ān-like scripture. In fact he is at pains in making this unmistakably clear:

As for our affirmation of the Torah and the Gospel, what is its camouflaged meaning? We have never ever rejected any of these two books, but we declare someone who rejects these books to be an infidel (kāfir). Indeed, what we have said is that God, the Sublime, truly revealed the Torah on Moses (peace be upon him); and He truly revealed the Psalms (Zabūr) on David (peace be upon him); and He truly revealed the Scrolls (Suḥuf) on Abraham and Moses (peace be upon them both); and He truly revealed unnamed Scriptures on unnamed Prophets. We believe in all of that (K. al-Fiṣal, Vol 1, 211-212).

In the above passage, Ibn Ḥazm carefully reaffirms his belief in all of God's revealed scriptures in response to those who may be inclined to gain the opposite impression in the light of his vituperative discourse on the Torah and the Gospel. Secondly, Ibn Ḥazm contends that the Jews did not faithfully preserve the original text of their divine scripture, the true Torah (al-Tawrā al-Saḥīha). The same contention is also made about the Christian

preservation of the genuine Evangel (Arabic - Injīl) revealed to Jesus. In fact Ibn Ḥazm is bold enough to claim that the infidels (kuffār) among the Children of Isreal and the infidels (kuffār) among the Christians changed the Torah and the Gospel respectively, by adding to it and subtracting from it (ibid).

According to Ibn Ḥazm this corruption and alteration of their divine scriptures was a deliberate and conscious act of infidelity, more especially on the part of the Jewish rabbis and Christian priests. Ibn Ḥazm is able to make such a bold theological judgement on the authenticity of the Torah and the Gospel on the basis of his own peculiar Islamic theology of revelation as well as his own literal reading of the relevant verses from the Qur'ān. But at which point, and how exactly did this corruption and alteration of the original texts of the Torah and the Gospels take place? This brings us to the third theological premise.

According to Ibn Ḥazm, the corruption and alteration of the original texts of the Torah and the Gospel can be explained by the defective manner of its transmission from generation to generation (Watt 1991:66; Powers 1986:116). In order to substantiate this claim, Ibn Ḥazm develops quite an elaborate interpretation of Judaeo-Christian history. Through it he attempts to show that both the Torah and the Gospel did not have multiple lines of transmission from one generation to the other, unlike the Qur'ān, or even the Prophetic ḥadīth. In relation to

the Torah, Ibn Ḥazm observes, it was the exclusive possession of the Kahānim or priestly class, who passed it down from father to son for over 1200 years. This exclusivist chain of transmission, Ibn Ḥazm believes is a virtual guarantee of, corruption, alteration, addition and subtraction. Ibn Ḥazm attributes much of the blame for corrupting the divine texts to their leaders (ru'as) (K. al-Fiṣal, 1:116).

Ibn Ḥazm strongly contends that the Jews themselves admit that the original Torah was altered and destroyed between the seventh and fifth centuries B.C. He basis this on the acknowledgement by Jews of the fact that Jehoahaz b. Josiah, the king of Judah (609 B.C.) removed the names of God from the Torah, replacing them with the names of idols, and that his successor, Jehoiakom b. Josiah, burned the Torah. And the Jews supposedly admit further, that at the time of the restoration in the fifth century B.C., the Torah had been forgotten, so that Ezra the Scribe had to reconstruct it, to the best of his ability from memory (Powers 1986:116).

In the chapter entitled "How the Torah was corrupted?" (Kayfa hurrifat al-Tawrā?), Ibn Ḥazm reconstructs the history and condition of the Torah from the death of Moses through to the demise of the Jewish empire and the eventual return of the Children of Isreal to the sacred temple at Jerusalem. Ibn Ḥazm describes no less than seven periods within which the entire Jewish community rejected faith and openly worshipped idols (K. al-Fiṣal, Vol 1, 187-189).

"Reflect! (Fa ta'ammalū!!)", Ibn Ḥazm cajoles:

What scripture can remain (safely preserved) with the rebelliousness of infidelity and the rejection of belief, throughout lengthy periods, and in a small country which is the size of a three day journey, and no-one remained on their religion or followed their scripture besides them on the surface of the earth (ibid).

With regard to the Gospels, Ibn Ḥazm develops an important distinction between it and the Torah, pointing out that no Christian would make the claim that the Gospel is the verbatim word of God conveyed by Him to Jesus, in the same way as the Jews would claim this about the Torah. On the contrary, he says:

All Christians agree that the Gospels are a composite of works by the four evangelists - Mathew, Mark, Luke and John - and a number of other writings (K. al-Fiṣal, Vol 2, 22).

In this sense then, Ibn Ḥazm displays an acute awareness of the different Christian perception of revelation from that of Jews and Muslims. Notwithstanding this fundamental difference in the history of the revealed texts, Ibn Ḥazm pursues his examination of the subsequent historical preservation of the Christian scriptures with no less rigour. He identifies and critically examines the lives of the writers of the Gospels. He notes that Paul, the author of, what is known as the 'Pauline epistles' was in contact with Jesus's apostle Peter for only a short time, suggesting that he could only have had an imperfect knowledge of what Peter could bear witness to. In a similar fashion Ibn Ḥazm continues to painstakingly examine the history of the four Gospels, according to the way the Christians of his time believed it to be true, attempting to expose contradictions therein, thereby producing what he regards as devastating

evidence against the Christians. His conclusion is that, the Gospels are historical works composed by human writers. Even these imperfect documents, Ibn Ḥazm notes, have suffered further historical alterations during later transmission. As an example, Ibn Ḥazm points to three hundred years before the conversion of Constantine when the Christians were persecuted and had no secure place for their sacred documents (K. al-Fiṣal, Vol 2, pgs 2-75).

The fourth and perhaps more important theological premise on which Ibn Hazm constructs his doctrine of tahrīf al-naṣṣ, is that of the assertion that God has left a portion of the original truth of the Torah and the Gospel intact, as a testimony against the Jews and the Christians as well as a means of disgracing them for tampering with God's words (K. al-Fiṣal, Vol 1, 212).

Ibn Ḥazm presents the incident of the unsuccessful covering of the verse in the Torah concerning the stoning of the adulter (rajm al-zāni) in the time of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him), as a vivid illustration of such a testimony against, and disgrace of the Jews. In this incident the Prophet Muḥammad had ordered that a Jew who had been found guilty of adultery be punished according to the penal laws of the Torah. A Jew by the name of Ibn Suriya who was reading the Torah's text dealing with this question, put his hand on the verse concerning the stoning of an adulterer in order to conceal it. A companion by the name of Ibn Salam noticed it and hit his hand away in order to reveal the verse, to the embarrassment and utter humiliation of the Jews.

The contents of this verse it was claimed confirmed the Islamic punishment for adulterers (K. al-Fiṣal, Vol 1, 315). The wisdom behind this divinely engineered situation, according to Ibn Ḥazm, is in total consonance with the manner in which God has dealt with all the transgressors against His Prophets. He left some of their hands free to kill some of His Prophets and He held back the hands of others from injuring His Prophets as a testimony against and disgrace of them (ibid).

Ibn Ḥazm's adherence to this theological postulate opens the way for him to embark on his major project, namely that of examining the Torah and the Gospels with a view to exposing the numerous contradictions contained in them.

CONTRADICTIONS (MUNĀOADĀT) IN THE TORAH AND THE GOSPELS

Ibn Ḥazm's expose of what he claims are real and not apparent contradictions contained in the Torah and in the Gospels covers no less than one hundred and forty pages, constituting the last third of the first volume of his K. al-Fiṣal, (pp. 116-186), as well as the first third of the second volume (pp. 2-69). The contradictions which Ibn Ḥazm finds are numerous and of a diverse nature. We reproduce here a selected list of some of the topics he highlights:

1. The discourse concerning the rivers in the Torah.
2. Concerning the murder of Cain.
3. The Torah's claim that God's children took women.
4. The Torah's claim that the progeny of Abraham ruled from the Nile to the Euphrates.
5. THE Torah's claim about Lot having slept with his son.

6. Abraham had more than one wife.
7. Jacob's love for his son Joseph.
8. Discourse on the selling of Joseph.
9. Discourse on some of the miracles of Moses.
10. God's request to Moses and his people to go to Palestine.
11. The Torah's claim that God promised Moses to see him from the back and not from the front.
12. The resurrection of the Messiah from the dead, by the permission of God.

Broadly speaking, the contradictions Ibn Ḥazm finds in the Torah and the Gospels can be divided into two sub-categories. Those dealing with contradictions relating to matters of belief and discrepancies and inconsistencies within the narratives contained in these books. We shall provide two examples of the former category from the Torah and two examples of the latter type for the Gospels, which are particularly significant.

THE TORAH'S CLAIM THAT ADAM IS A DEITY (ILĀH) AMONG DEITIES

Ibn Ḥazm argues that the Torah's version of the story of Adam's banishment out of the Garden of Eden, suggests that he could have become a deity like God, if he had gone on to eat from the Tree of Life, which would have given him immortality. This calamitous statement, Ibn Ḥazm claims, has led certain high ranking and educated Jewish sects to the belief that God is merely a mortal who ate from both trees in the Garden (K. al-Fiṣal, 1:120-121; see also Powers 1986:112). Ibn Ḥazm concludes by seeking refuge in God from such fatuous infidelity (kufr al-ahmaq).

SENDING MOSES TO PHARAOH

Ibn Ḥazm quotes from the second chapter of the Torah where God allegedly tells Moses to inform Pharaoh that "Israel" is his (God's) first born son and that he should be allowed to serve him failing which God would destroy Pharaoh's first born son.

Ibn Ḥazm reads into this statement of the Torah that it suggests that God had a son. After this how can one blame the Christians for attributing a son to God, says Ibn Ḥazm. In other words, Ibn Ḥazm is arguing that the Jews in fact had paved the way for the Christians to attribute a son to God. Ibn Ḥazm concludes that in this sense the Christians are less blasphemous towards God, as they attribute to God a son who came with great miracles, whereas the Jews on the basis of this verse are attributing to God all of the Children of Isreal (i.e. that they are all literally children of God) (K. al-Fiṣal, 1, 153).

THE GOSPELS ACCOUNT CONCERNING THE CHOICE OF THE FIRST APOSTLES

Ibn Ḥazm quotes Matthew 4, 12-22; Mark 1, 14-20; Luke 5, 1-11 and John 1, 35-22 (Casper and Gaudel 1980:78) and concludes that there are four basic contradictions contained in the Gospel accounts of the first apostles. They relate to:

(1) The time the first apostleship of Andrew and his brother Simon Peter commenced. Was it before the imprisonment of John the Baptist as Mathew and Mark records, or was it after the imprisonment of John as he himself claims.

(2) The place where the first apostleship took place. Was it at the place where the Messiah found Peter and Andrew entering their nets into the sea as they were about to fish as Matthew and Mark relates, or was it at the place where Andrew was standing with John when he heard him remark when the Messiah walked pass "Behold the Lamb of God!", as John records.

(3) The sequence of the first companionship. Did Simon, Peter and his brother Andrew jointly become the Messiah's first apostles at the same point in time, or was it Andrew who became the Messiah's first apostle and subsequently recruited his brother Simon?

(4) The conditions in which the Messiah found his first two apostles. Was it as they were entering their nets into the sea or was it as they were getting out of their boat in order to wash their nets after they had spent the entire night without catching any fish?

According to Ibn Ḥazm, one of these four confusing stories must be untrue. Such untruths however cannot be attributed to God, nor a Prophet, neither of any truthful person. Ibn Ḥazm also points out that Saint John had translated the Gospel of Matthew from Hebrew to Greek and therefore he must have come across the differences in the two accounts. These clear contradictions is sufficient proof, Ibn Ḥazm claims, "that the Gospels are the works of accursed liars (min 'amal kādhibīn mal'ūnīn)" (K. al-Fiṣal, 2, 19-21).

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS

Ibn Ḥazm cites Matthew 9, 18-19 and 23-25; Luke 8, 40-42 and 49-56 and Mark 5, 21-43, (Caspar and Gaudeul 1980:81) and argues that all of these contain different accounts of the incident of Christ and the daughter of Jairus.

In the account of Matthew as quoted by Ibn Ḥazm, Christ is reported as emphatically saying that Jairus's daughter was not dead but only unconscious and very sick. If this version is accepted, Ibn Ḥazm argues, Christians are then forced to explain what miracle Christ produced in this instance, since he did not resurrect her from death. In the text from the Gospel of Luke reporting on the same incident, Christ ordered Jairus to "believe and his daughter would live again," (amin fatahya ibnatuk).

Ibn Ḥazm concludes that one of these two accounts must be false, for if one acknowledge either one of the two versions as the truth, it amounts to saying that Christ lied in public. And what does this tell us about a Deity who allows his Prophet to utter lies?

The second contradiction which Ibn Ḥazm finds within this incident is that of the miracle that Christ was supposed to have performed, of which we have already made mention. According to the Gospels, Christ secluded himself from the people when he allegedly performed the miracle. Ibn Ḥazm regards this as being strange since he argues, it would only be logical for a Prophet to perform his miracles in the presence of the people so as to persuade them with regard to his Divine mission. To further

support his argument, Ibn Ḥazm relates two occasions when Christ was unable to produce a miracle, one of these was in front of the Jews, and when he was asked about it, he reportedly said the following: "you will not see a miracle except the miracle of Jonas who remained in the belly of the whale for three days." Ibn Ḥazm concludes that the above contradiction is but one of the multiple calamitous affirmations that the Gospels are inverted and falsified (K. al-Fiṣal, 2, 25-26).

JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO IBN ḤAZM'S CONFUTATION OF THE TORAH AND THE GOSPELS

Surprisingly, hardly any Jewish or Christian scholars have attempted to produce a detailed refutation of the numerous contradictions Ibn Ḥazm has identified in the Torah and the Gospels. The closest work we have been able to locate is a Ph.D. dissertation 'Die Pentateuchzitate Ibn Ḥazms', produced by a German student, E. Algermissen. He critically examined Ibn-Ḥazm's use of the Hebrew Bible. (Powers 1986) We have however not been able to find any published work in this regard. This is certainly peculiar, since there exists unanimity amongst scholars with regard to the importance of Ibn Ḥazm's work in the Muslim-Jewish-Christian polemic. Moreover, Sweetman had raised the alarm almost a half a century ago when he warned his colleagues that Ibn Ḥazm's confutations of the Bible;

is not to be regarded as an excursion into a bygone age which might well be left in oblivion, because there is at least one modern translation of the book for the reading of University students in Hyderabad and printed under the imprimatur of the press of the Osmania University. It is therefore important in another point, because it reveals

what is being taught to Muslims even today, and its arguments may well be one of the forces to be reckoned with by those who seek understanding between Islam and Christianity (Moon 1984:67).

Sweetman's prediction was correct. However, even he would have been amazed at the phenomenal interest that has been displayed in the life and work of Ibn Ḥazm and more particularly his contributions in the area of comparative religion. We have already indicated that no less than three Ph. D. dissertations focussing exclusively on Ibn Ḥazm's K. al-Fiṣal have been produced during the course of the eighties.

During that same period, the Islamic University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, published an edited text (taḥqīq) of K. al-Fiṣal in Arabic.(8) This was no doubt done, in order to facilitate its use as a primary text for Muslim students specializing in the field of comparative religion.

The fact that no detailed and systematic refutation of Ibn Ḥazm's contradictions in the Torah and the Gospels has been produced, should however not be interpreted to mean that Jewish and Christian scholars have been mute on them. On the contrary, they have been especially vocal in what we venture to describe as tedious repetitions of the charge that Ibn Ḥazm is far too polemical and reviling in his discourse. A lamentable, though certainly not an adequate critique as we have hopefully illustrated during the course of this chapter.

(8) An edited version of Ibn Ḥazm's K. al-Fiṣal was produced by Dr. Muḥammad Ibrahim Nasr and Dr. Abdurrahmān 'Umayra of Islamic University of Imam Muḥammad bin Sa'ūd in Riyadh - Published by 'Ukaz, Saudi Arabia, 1982.

The other major criticism that both Jewish and Christian scholars have raised against Ibn Ḥazm is, that of accusing him of misreading the Torah and the Gospels. David Powers has argued that the basic and underlying reason for this misreading is that Ibn Ḥazm examined the Torah with an eye to finding in it contradictions, errors, inconsistencies and anthropomorphisms. But why should Ibn Ḥazm be interested in pursuing such an agenda? Powers offers the following plausible answer:

In order to confirm the Muslim contention, mentioned already in the Qur'ān that the Jews had distorted the text of the Torah (a phenomenon known in Arabic as tahrīf) (Powers 1986:115).

Watt has raised a similar critique of Ibn Ḥazm when he argues that:

..... Ibn Ḥazm, despite his much greater knowledge of Christianity, had no interest in obtaining a deeper understanding of the Christian religion, but was only concerned to defend his faith and the perception of Christianity derived from the Qur'ān and the subsequent elaborations (Watt 1991:67).

Watt however has not been as generous to Ibn Ḥazm as was Powers, most probably because of his greater expertise in the field of Islamic studies. He has not acquiesced to Ibn Ḥazm's literal reading of the Qur'anic verses relating to tahrīf, but has instead seriously questioned its correctness. Watt has carefully examined the four passages in the Qur'ān where the word 'yuharrifūna' occurs, which is a form of the verb which has tahrīf as its verbal noun, and concluded that 'they do not contain anything like a doctrine of universal corruption' (Watt 1991:30). Watt must most certainly have found great inspiration for his line of critique from the knowledge that classical Muslim

commentators such as Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabari (d. 923) as well as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzi (d. 1209) were equally not convinced of the unambiguous nature of the relevant Qur'anic verses pertaining to tahrīf. It is to a closer examination of these verses and their diverse interpretations among the classical Muslim commentators that we shall turn our attention in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE QUR'ĀN, IBN ḤAZM AND THE DOCTRINE OF TAHRĪF

Abū Muhammad 'Ali Ibn Ḥazm was acutely aware of the fact that there existed Muslim scholars who did not share his unequivocal 'reading' of the Qur'anic passages pertaining to tahrīf. We use the term reading deliberately in order to distinguish it from interpretation or ta'wīl. Since Ibn Ḥazm rejects all kinds of ta'wīlāt (interpretations) vehemently, he prefers to analyse and study the text per se, paying particular attention to nuances of language. Ibn Ḥazm therefore sticks to the obvious meaning of a word and rejects what he believes are inevitably far-fetched interpretations (Abu Layla 1990:35). But exactly how obvious are the meanings contained in the Qur'anic passages pertaining to tahrīf? This is the critical question which we shall attempt to address in this chapter.

In order to set the scene for this examination, we shall commence by presenting a potent portion of Ibn Ḥazm's critique of those Muslim scholars who do not share his view that the Qur'ān explicitly endorses the doctrine of tahrīf al-naṣṣ.

We have been informed about a group of Muslims who reject by their ignorance, the doctrine that the Torah and the Gospels which are in the possession of the Jews and the Christians are corrupted. Surely what leads them to this conclusion is their lack of insight in the textual ordinances of the Qu'rān and the prophetic traditions. Have these people ever heard the Word of God, the Sublime:

"(O people of the book! why do you clothe the truth with falsehood, and conceal the truth while you have knowledge)
And His, the Sublime's Word:

(Behold, some of them conceal the truth,
which they themselves know)

And His, the Sublime's Word:

(And behold, there are indeed some of
them who distort the book with their
tongues, (as they read) so as to make
you think that (what they say) is a
part of the book, while it is not from
the book; and they say, it is from God;
the while it is not from God

And His, the Sublime's Word:

(They change the words from their
(right) places)

There are very many similar verses in
the Qur'ān. And we say to those Muslims
who claim that their transmission of
their scriptures is consecutive,
thereby creating an obligation in
knowledge and establishing it as an
authoritative source. And that they
(the Jews and the Christians) do not
dispute and have no doubt that what
they have transmitted from the
revelations of Moses and Jesus does
not mention Muḥammad, and there is no
prediction about his prophecy.

(We say to those Muslims who make
claims such as the aforementioned);
that if they believe such heedless
people in some of their transmissions
then it obliges them to take them as
trustworthy in all of their
transmissions, whether they like it or
not. And if they dispute them in
some of their transmissions and they
deem them as trustworthy in others,
then surely they are contradictory,
and their stubbornness becomes manifest.
And (furthermore that argument) is void
that holds that a single
transmission from the same source, that
part of it is true and part of it is
false; they have indeed
contradicted themselves and we do
not know how a Muslim can deem it
possible to deny the doctrine of the
corruption of the Torah and the
Gospels, while he hears the (following)
Words of God, the Almighty:

(Muḥammad is the messenger of God; and those who are with him are strong against the disbelievers, (but) compassionate amongst each other. You will see them bow and prostrate themselves seeking grace from God and (His) good pleasure. On their faces are their marks, (being) the traces of their prostration. This is their similitude in the Torah; and their similitude in the Gospel, (they are) like a seed that sends forth its blade, then makes it strong; it then becomes thick and it stands on its own stem, (filling) the sowers with wonder and delight. As a result it fills the disbelievers with rage at them. God has promised those among them who believe and do righteous deeds forgiveness, and a great reward).

And nothing of this (from abovementioned verses) are in the scriptures which the Jews and Christians have in their possession, which they claim to be the Torah and the Gospel; it is imperative for these ignoramuses to deem as trustworthy and confirm what their Most Honourable and Almighty Lord has said; that the Jews and the Christians have changed the Torah and the Gospel, or else they must resort to foolishness and belie their Most Honourable and Almighty Lord, and they must confirm and deem as trustworthy the Jews and the Christians and they must join them (K. al-Fiṣal, 1, 215-216).

From the above extensive quote from Ibn Ḥazm, we derive the following:

1. Ibn Ḥazm bases his case against those Muslims who reject the doctrine of tahrīf al-nass primarily on what he describes as their lack of insight (ih̄tibāl) in the textual ordinances of the Qur'ān.

2. In order to substantiate his case, Ibn Ḥazm quotes the following verses from the Qur'ān; 3:71; 2:146; 3:78 and 5:13, of which he claims there are very many similar in the Qur'ān.

3. Interestingly though, Ibn Ḥazm quotes these verses without commenting on any one of them, and simply asks the following rhetorical question: 'Have these people ever heard the Words of God, the Sublime?'

4. It is obvious therefore that Ibn Ḥazm is completely and utterly convinced that the Qur'anic verses on tahrīf are so clear and emphatic that there can be no doubt with regard to its meanings.

5. Ibn Ḥazm takes it for granted that the Qur'ān is always referring to changes that the Jews and Christians have brought about in the text of the Torah and the Gospels. He never entertains the idea that the changes referred to in the Qur'ān might have taken place in the interpretations of these texts. A likely reason for this is that Ibn Ḥazm does not give credence to interpretations of the texts in the first place.

6. Finally, the chief truth which the people of the book have clothed with falsehood, concealed, distorted with their tongues and changed from their right places, according to Ibn Ḥazm, is the prediction of the prophecy of Muḥammad. But just how emphatic and obvious have the major commentators of Qur'ān found the meanings of these verses pertaining to tahrīf? It is to an examination of this question that we shall now turn our attention.

THE QUR'ĀN ON TAHRĪF

The Qur'ān speaks many times and in diverse ways of an alteration of the Torah and the Gospel by their keepers, the people of the book (ahl al-kitāb). These brief and very often allusive passages are found dispersed throughout the Qur'ān and can be regrouped into six series, using the vocabulary employed by the Qur'ān.

The study of the Qur'anic vocabulary concerning tahrīf reveals the following six concepts:

1. Tahrīf: Qur'ān 2:75; 4:46; 5:13; 5:41
2. Tabdīl 2:59; 7:162
3. Kitmān 2:42,140,146,159,174; 3:71,187
4. Labs 2:42; 3:71
5. Layy 3:78; 4:46
6. Nisyān 5:13,14; 7:53,165

We shall examine each of these six concepts as they appear in the relevant Qur'anic passages, and particularly note the interpretations given to them by two well-known classical commentators of the Qur'ān, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabari (d. 923) and Fakhr al-Dīn 'Abu 'Abd Allah Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn al-Ḥusain al-Rāzi (d. 1209).

Our choice of commentators is significant, since it places Ibn-Ḥazm's literal (ẓāhirī) reading of the Qur'anic verses pertaining to tahrīf in a useful exegetical context, since Ṭabari precedes Ibn Ḥazm by seventy years and Rāzi comes a full century later. Moreover, in the genre of tafsīr (exegetical) literature,

Tabari's Jami' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl ay al-Our'ān is the most important and voluminous work belonging to the class of Qur'anic commentary known as tafsīr bi-l-riwāya. By this is meant all explanations of the Qur'ān which can be traced back through a sound chain of transmission to the Prophet Muḥammad, the companions of the Prophet and the succeeding generation (tabi'ūn). On the other hand, Rāzi's Mafātiḥ al-ghaib also known as tafsīr al-kabīr is recognized as one of the most comprehensive works belonging to the class of tafsīr bi-l-ray'. As opposed to the former, tafsīr bi-l-ray' does not base itself uncritically on the transmission of knowledge by the predecessors, but derives an opinion through ijtihād/reason based on sound sources (Von Denffer 1983:125-138).

1. TAHRĪF

We have translated tahrif interchangeably as alteration and corruption. The term has however also been translated as distortion, falsification and perversion.

Razi elaborates on the definitions of tahrīf as given by the philologist and poet, Abubakr al-Qaffāl (903-976) and the Mu'tazilite theologian, al-Qādi 'Abd al-Jabbār (936-1025).

According to Qaffāl, tahrīf means to bend something from its natural condition (huwa imālah al-shay 'an ḥaqqihi); as erroneously changing a vowel - sign or letter in writing or uttering it; or as the condition of the writing pen when the point is not cut straight but somewhat inclined. Al-Qādi argues that tahrif could either take the form of changes in the literal text (lafz) or in the meaning (ma'na) (Rāzi, 11, p. 149).

On the basis of the above definitions, Rāzi notes four kinds of Jewish tahrīf:

1. Substitution of a term of the Pentateuch for another term;
2. Giving to the context a false interpretation (he regards this as the best explanation of tahrīf);
3. Simulating adherence to Muḥammed's words in his presence but dissenting from him in his absence;
4. Inverting the precepts of the Pentateuch, applying, for example, beating for the stoning therein decreed.

(Quoted in Di Matteo, 1992).

Abdelmajid Charfi has painstakingly perused Ṭabari's commentary and has identified the following forms of tahrīf acknowledged by him:

1. alteration in general of the text or its regulations and proofs,
2. interpretations of the Injīl in an incorrect way,
3. composition of books and attributing them to Allah,
4. accusation of falsity made against Allah,
5. causing discord in religion and disbelief in the messengers,
6. in general, (distortion) refers to the denial of any description of Muḥammad found (in the Injīl); keeping it secret from those who are ignorant of it; alteration of the Injīl's commands in this respect; concealing Islam.

(Charfi 1980:109)

As we have already mentioned, the Qur'ān uses the word yuharrifūna, a form of the verb which has tahrīf as its verbal noun (masdar), on four occasions.

Two of the verses i.e. 4:46 and 5:41, makes explicit reference to its addressees -alladhīna hādu - those of the Jewish faith. Though the same explicit reference is not made in the other two passages, the context within which they appear makes it abundantly clear that its addressees are the Jews. Commentators of the Qur'ān are unanimously agreed that the Jews are indeed its addressees. Ayoub argues that the only difference among the commentators is the specific Jewish group (farīq) referred to in the passages (Ayoub 1984:120). In 2:75 for example, is it the group of seventy Jews who heard God's speech together with Moses at Mount Sinai, or is it the group of learned men among the Jews of Madina who altered the Torah as Rāzi argues is the case? (Rāzi, 1, 377-379)

The precise answer to this question, according to Rāzi is critical. For it provides one with a useful answer to the question as to what exactly was altered or changed. If one accepts the position taken by Ṭabari that those who altered were the seventy men at the time of Moses, they would have altered nothing relating to Muḥammad, but only injunctions and prohibitions. If, on the other hand, they were the learned Jews living in Madina at the time of Muḥammad, it is more probable that what they altered are things relating to Muḥammad (Rāzi, 111, 134-135). Rāzi is able to raise such a problem since the

literal verse of the Qur'ān does not in any way indicate what the group of Jews actually altered.

Whilst we are impressed by Rāzi's critical method, we do not accept his conclusion that the group (farīq) alluded to in 2:75, are from the Jewish contemporaries of Muḥammad. The literal sense of the verse -yasma'ūn kalām Allah - 'they heard the Word of God' - does not support such an emphatic conclusion.

Moreover, Ṭabari relates on the authority of Rabī' ibn Anas (d. 762) and Muḥammad ibn Ishāq (d. 768) that the group intended were the men who had been given permission by God to hear his Words when speaking to Moses. When the men returned with Moses, a few of these privileged Jews reported the opposite of what they had heard. They said to the people, "We heard God say such and such, which, if you are able to do, do so, but if you are not able, there shall be no blame on you" (Ṭabari, 11, 201).

If the above argued position is accepted, the question of a distortion of the text (tahrīf al-naṣṣ) of the Torah does not arise at all. A conclusion which is ironically supported by Rāzi.

2. TABDĪL

The term tabdīl is the verbal noun (maṣḍar) of the verb baddala which occurs 11 times in the Qur'ān. However only on two of these occasions i.e. 2:59 and 7:102, does it relate to the question of tahrīf. It has been variously translated as substitution,

change, alteration and exchange. The more appropriate meaning in the two verses under discussion is to substitute or replace (badala) a word (qawl) by another.

Barring a verbal difference, two of the tabdīl verses are almost literally identical. In 2:59 we have "infringed (Our command)", and in 7:162, we have "transgressed". The verbal difference however makes no difference to the sense. Both relate to the same incident in the history of the Children of Isreal as introduced by 2:58 and 7:161. In these verses the Qur'ān mentions that the original word which God had ordered them to utter on entering the town (qaryah) was 'hittatun' (meaning in the context "Remove Thou from us the burden of our sins"). Whilst the Qur'ān does emphatically indicate that the word "hittatun" was changed (baddalū) it does not tell us with what it was substituted.

In order to provide clarity on this question Ṭabari has listed the following traditional accounts concerning the substituted word (qawl). Abu Huraira relates that the Messenger of God said that it was "habbatun fi sha'irat" (a grain in a barleycorn). Abd Allah ibn Mas'ūd reported that it was "hinta hamrā'" (Red wheat in which is barleycorn). Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid and Ibn Zaid all claims just one word "hinta" (wheat).

Last but not least Ibn Mas'ūd argues that it was 'a pierced grain of red wheat in which is a black barleycorn' (Ṭabari, 1, pp. 339-340). Notwithstanding the differences in the claims of the traditional accounts regarding the substituted word they are at

one in arguing, that the Children of Isreal played with a derisive intent upon the word 'hittah', substituting for it something irrelevant or meaningless. Ayoub suggests that their purpose was to make a mockery of the divine command (Ayoub 1984:107).

Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) has argued that the word (qawl) referred to in 2:58 and 7:102 is merely a metaphor for an attitude of mind demanded of the Children of Israel on entering the town, and that, correspondingly, the "substitution" (tabdīl) signifies here a willful display of arrogance in disregard of God's command (Quoted in Ayoub 1984:106).

In conclusion, even if we accept the traditional conclusions based on the literal meaning of this text, that a divine word (qawl) was derisively substituted by the Jews (baddalu), this is certainly not sufficient evidence on which to construct an elaborate doctrine of tahrīf al-naṣṣ against the Jews and neither the Christians. It is also interesting to note that neither this commentary of Ṭabari nor that of Rāzi make any such construction.

3. KITMĀN

According to Caspar and Gaudeul, kitmān can be defined as 'the act of hiding or concealing words or passages of scripture so that Muslims would not know about them' (Caspar and Gaudeul 1980:63). Five such references occur in Surah al-Baqarah and two in Surah Al-'Imrān. All of these verses admonish the Jews

of Madina, but without doubt also the Christians.

Tabari avers that the kitmān (concealing of the truth wittingly) referred to in 2:42 is the work of the rabbis (religious leaders). But what truth were they wittingly concealing? According to Ṭabari they were concealing the description of Muḥammad which they found in their scripture, that he (Muḥammad) is God's messenger to all humankind. Furthermore, according to Ṭabari, they concealed part of God's covenant imposed on them in their scripture, that they should have faith in Muḥammad, in what he brought, and to attest to his truthfulness (Ṭabari, I, 278-279).

In his commentary on 2:146, Ṭabari relates on the authority of a number of earlier commentators that the concealing of the truth (i.e. the direction of prayer-Qiblah) were the work of Jewish rabbis as well as Christian savants. Moreover, Ṭabari quotes Mujāhid as saying the following:-

"They concealed (the prophecies about) Muḥammad even though they found it all written in their Torah and Gospel" (Ṭabari, III, 188)

With regard to 2:159, Ṭabari believes that the kitmān (truth concealed) relates to the stoning verse (āyat al rajm) as well as the prophecies concerning Muḥammad (Ṭabari, III, pp. 257-258).

At this point it is expedient to note the view taken up by Rāzi on the question of the prophecies concerning Muḥammad in the Torah and the Gospels. Rāzi raises the following objection: If

the Scriptures contain testimonies in favour of Muḥammad, how does it happen that those who possess them do not believe in him? In answer to this, Rāzi adduces two reasons:-

1. The prophecy concerning Muḥammad could be known to those alone who had profound knowledge of their sacred books, but as these are few, it is possible for them to keep the characteristics relating Muḥammad concealed.

2. On this question the Biblical text is not very clear, hence doubts and uncertainty may arise.

It is at this point that Rāzi raises the following critical question: 'Can it be supposed that the Scriptures contain some mention of the time, place and other circumstances of Muḥammad? If so, the Biblical text should be so clear as to make it impossible to conceal these notices. Otherwise the text of the Bible cannot yield any argument for the prophetic office of Muḥammad.'

Razi concludes by arguing that the Bible does not specify the time and the place of the coming of Muḥammad in such a clear manner as to be known by everybody. Hence it is not an absolute necessity that these should have been known in the religion of former prophets (Rāzi, 1, 315-319; see also Di Matteo 1923:69).

4. LABS

Labs which literally means 'clothing' can be defined as disguising or confounding the truth. It occurs only in two places in the Qur'ān i.e. 2:42 and 3:71, and significantly in both cases it precedes two verses relating to kitmān.

The question of labs is therefore closely linked to kitmān and should be read together.

In relation to the labs verses, Ṭabari asks the following pertinent question: 'How can they confound the truth with falsehood when they are unbelievers? What truth can be with them when they disbelieve in God?' He replies by arguing that the answer lies in the strange behaviour of the Jewish munāfiqīn (hypocrites). They publicly declared that they believed in the truth of Muḥammad while secretly they disbelieved in him. They tried to falsely reconcile their public and private discrepancy, by saying: "Muḥammad is a delegated prophet, but he was delegated to others, not to us".

Ṭabari concludes from this that their averring that Muḥammad had been sent to others while denying he had been sent to them, was a confounding (labs) of the truth with falsehood, for God sent Muḥammad to all creations without exception (Ṭabari, 1, 277).

It is thus clear from our examination of Ṭabari's commentary on the verses pertaining to labs, that there exists no relationship between it and the doctrine of tahrīf al-nass.

5. LAYY

According to Casper and Gaudeul, the Qur'anic concept 'Layy' refers to the 'twisting' of the tongue in the mouth while reading in such a manner that the hearer does not understand its meaning at all, or understands something else. It is given to us in the two layy verses of the Qur'ān, 3:78 and 4:46.

Most commentators argue that both verses refers specifically to the Jews, even though the addressees i.e. -ALLADHĪNA HĀDŪ- are only clarified in the latter passage. The latter passage is also significant in another sense, since it also refers to tahrīf literally.

With regard to the former passage i.e. 3:78, Rāzi quotes the companion of the Prophet Muḥammad, ‘Abdullah ibn-Abbās as saying that; ‘what is implied in the reading of the false book’. Rāzi then cites 2:79, and argues that the book which they read was not the book revealed by God, but one which they had written with their own hands.

Even if one does not accept Rāzi’s interpretation the verses dealing with layy certainly does not provide one with any evidence to make a case for tahrīf al-nass. On the contrary it seems to be important evidence for these scholars who argue that the tahrīf alluded to by the Qur’ān is distortion in the interpretations or rather to be more specific in this case the reading aloud of the text of the Torah. A point which Watt makes with particular sharpness; "There is nothing here about any corruption of the scriptures" (Watt 1991:32).

6. NISYĀN

Nisyān refers to the forgetting of a part of the scripture. According to Caspar and Gaudeul, nisyān (i.e. forgetting God’s admonitions in his scripture) is the major reproach which God made to the Jews in the time of Moses (7:163) and the Jews of

Madina (5:13; 7:53), as well as the Christians in the time of the Prophet (5:14). The accusation of nisyān is made equally with regard to Jews as well as Christians as can be clearly gleaned from a reading of 5:13 and 5:14.

CONCLUSION

In order to complete our extensive examinations of the Qur'anic references to tahrīf and its related concepts, it would be necessary to deal with one last verse i.e. 2:79. For many commentators have also seen in this verse and allusion to tahrīf.

Tabari raises the hypothetical question as to why the text of the Qur'ān says "who write the scripture with their hands" when surely everybody writes with their hand. He replies that this clarifies the point that the learned Jews who altered the Torah did so in their own handwriting and in full knowledge of the enormity of their lies, and not by employing or delegating ignorant scribes to write for them. These false scriptures were then sold to a people who knew neither it nor what was in the original Torah, being ignorant of what was in God's scriptures. The objective of these culprits was purely financial. And what a cheap bid and foolish bargain they made (fa wailul lahum min mā yaksibūn).

Tabari however is ambivalent. In reading his commentary on this verse, sometimes one gets the impression that he is asserting that a small group of learned Jews wrote another book, containing

their own false interpretations of the original Torah, and sold it off as the Torah itself. At some other stage though, one gains the impression that Ṭabari is saying that the learned Jews added to and deleted from the original Torah what they wished and then sold it off as the Torah. What they deleted in particular was descriptions relating to Muḥammad. Because of this God raised unto himself or rather removed forever some portion of the original Torah (fa raf'a b'ad al-tawrā)

There is no doubt an important difference in these two positions. The latter position which appears to be the one which Ṭabari supports is consistent with that of Ibn Ḥazm's theological premises. And clearly does assert that the Jews corrupted the text of the original Torah. We are, though, obliged to point out that Ṭabari does not pursue this position as rigorously and consistently as does Ibn Ḥazm. But then again this seems to be the major problem with Ṭabari's commentary, not only in relation to the Torah but also of the Gospel. In fact in relation to the latter scripture, Ṭabari is even more ambivalent. Charfi has for example argued that; "Ṭabari hesitates between regarding the Gospel as "exhortations and warnings and as a scripture with its own legal rulings (aḥkām) and a particular code of conduct (shar'ah); moreover he sometimes considers it as a scripture of the Jews, similar to and in comparison with the Torah" (Charfi 1980:108).

It was this kind of ambivalence which allowed Ignazio Di Matteo to argue, that Ṭabari does not support the doctrine of tahrīf al-naṣṣ (MW (13) 1923). Notwithstanding this major problem with Ṭabari's commentary on the question of tahrīf, we can safely conclude from our analysis, that Ṭabari's reading of the Qur'anic passages on tahrīf is a far cry from that of the unequivocal reading of a doctrine of tahrīf al-naṣṣ into these same passages by Ibn Ḥazm.

In contradistinction to Ṭabari's 'hesitating ambivalence' on the question of tahrīf, Rāzi is more direct in his dealing with the question. He clearly gives it an important place in his commentary. He does not take for granted the earlier traditional interpretations of tahrīf, but questions them critically and arrives at a radically different conclusion. Rāzi is clearly not convinced that the Qur'ān supports a doctrine of tahrīf al-naṣṣ (distortion of the text of the Torah and the Gospel), and categorically affirms that the text of the Torah and the Gospels has not been distorted (see Di Matteo MW 1992:77). In this respect Rāzi stands in direct opposition to Ibn Ḥazm.

In conclusion, our extensive examination of the Qur'anic passages pertaining to tahrīf has shown that two of the major classical commentators of the Qur'ān, in the form of Ṭabari and Rāzi, do not share Ibn Ḥazm's assertion that these verses are so emphatic and obvious that it obliges Muslims to accept the doctrine of tahrīf al-naṣṣ.

CHAPTER FOUR

TOWARDS A NEW CONCEPTION OF TAHRĪF

Until now, we have approached the Jewish and Christian scriptures from the standpoint of the classical Islamic conception of the revelation (wahy) of the Qur'ān: a text descended (tanzīl) directly word for word by God to the Prophet, who has been charged with transmitting it (5:67). And no-one represents this approach more adequately than Abū Muhammad 'Alī Ibn Ḥazm. Our critical line of inquiry has been to pose the question if the Torah and the Gospels can be regarded as a faithful reproduction of the divinely revealed Word of God to their respective Prophets, Moses and Jesus, in their original form.

The contemporary debate around the issue of tahrīf has called into question this traditional Muslim approach to the Judaeo-Christian scriptures. Modern scholars of tahrīf, both non-Muslim as well as Muslim, have pointed out that there are in fact two radically different theologies of revelation, the Muslim one and the Jewish and Christian one (Muslim-Christian Research Group 1989:79). With this new found mutual appreciation of the originality and uniqueness of each others' approaches to the understanding of the phenomenon of revelation, Caspar and Gaudeul claim that the way now seems to be opened for a new interpretation of the classical Muslim doctrine of tahrīf (Caspar and Gaudeul 1980:101).

Two modern authors in particular, have clearly seen a distinction between the two theories of revelation. The first is the Egyptian medical doctor and author of many works dealing with religious matters, Dr. M. Kāmil Ḥusayn, who died in 1979. He had a mystical background and accepted that the essential truthfulness of Judaism, Christianity and Islam is the same. He proposed that controversy and dispute arose only from the followers of these religious traditions because of the different expression of their religious experiences. Specifically with regard to the controversial doctrine of tahrīf, Ḥusayn presents the problem in a novel manner in his book Al-dhikr al-hakīm. We present hereunder a synopsis of his position (Quoted in Caspar and Gaudeul, 1980:103).

1. Ḥusayn starts from the premise that the source of the confusion is that the Torah and the Injīl referred to by the Qur'ān is different from the Old and New Testaments which are in the possession of the Jews and the Christians.

2. He then claims that there are no Jews and Christians who would claim that the Old and New Testaments are textual revelations to Moses and Jesus respectively. Rather, they perceive them to be the work of inspired saints who faithfully reflected through their writings what they knew of the histories of Moses and Jesus.

3. On the basis of the above two assertions, he concludes that there can be no correspondence (la yakūnu tutābuq) between the revealed (wahy) Torah and Injīl which Muslims refer to, and the

inspired (ilhām) Old and New Testaments which are in the possession of Jews and Christians. What Ḥusayn means here is that the confusion can be resolved if one accepts that there are in fact two distinct modes of revelation. The Muslim one is characterized by the idea of a revealed text (nassan wa wahyan), and the Judaeo-Christian one can be described as sacred biographies written by inspired saints (sīrah produced by qaddisiyīn mulhamīn).

4. He also develops an interesting contextual understanding of tahrīf. He argues that tahrīf only occurred among the Jews of Madina and the Christians of the Arabian Peninsula, and that it would still be possible for the Muslims to derive and extract the 'authentic' Torah and Injīl from the Old and New Testaments that has now come down to us. Essentially what Ḥusayn is arguing here is that if one believes that the Qur'anic charge of tahrīf is only directed at the Jews of Madina and the Christians of the Arabian Peninsula, not every single Jew and Christian situated in every nook and cranny of the world, then it becomes possible to reconstruct 'the revealed text' of the authentic Torah and Injīl spoken of in the Qur'ān. A task which Ḥusayn believes the Qur'ān exhorts Muslims to undertake when it speaks about the Torah and the Injīl.

5. Ḥusayn suggests that the way in which this 'reconstruction' of the 'revealed text' of the Torah and Injīl should proceed, is to extract all the direct sayings of Moses and Jesus from the Old and New Testaments which he regards as sacred biographies of these Prophets.

6. In order to cover himself, Ḥusayn proposes that only those quotations from Moses and Jesus which do not contradict the Qur'an should be regarded as authentic. Furthermore, he argues that at no point in the Old and New Testament does Jesus refer to himself as "son of God" (ibn-Allah), but always as "son of human being" (ibn-al-bashr or ibn al-insān). When Jesus refers to God as "O my Father" (yā Abatī), it should be understood by us as a token of respect and not taken literally.

Dr. Kāmil Ḥusayn has no doubt developed a useful though not completely convincing conception of tahrīf. Firstly, he works on the assumption that all Jews and Christians accept that their scriptures are not the divinely revealed Words of God. And secondly, and more damning is the fact that he assumes that Jewish and Christian concepts of revelation are exactly equivalent. In this regard we have already seen that Ibn Ḥazm was far more nuanced.

Notwithstanding its weaknesses, the major strength of Husayn's thesis is the fact that it directs us to a possible way out of the impasse in the tahrīf al-nass/tahrīf al-ma'ānī debate. It points to a new conception of tahrīf, based on a more or less clear perception of the difference between the Christian idea of inspiration and the Muslim idea of revelation.

The contemporary Muslim specialist in comparative religion, Professor Mahmoud M. Ayoub (b. 1935 - ?), also identifies a difference between the mode of revelation of the Bible as opposed to that of the Qur'ān. The former, according to Ayoub is more a revelation of action or a record of God's acting in the history

of humankind. The Qur'anic mode of revelation on the other hand is more direct communication or commandment from God to humanbeing. Moreover, Ayoub insists that the Qur'an does not present a view of the textual corruption (tahrīf al-naṣṣ) of the Bible, and he therefore accepts that Muslims can use the Bible just as he would encourage Christians to use the Qur'ān. (Ayoub, 1982)

In our discussion thusfar, we have assumed that there does exist a unique and monolithic Islamic concept of revelation. It is an assumption which underpins most if not all of the Muslim theories on tahrīf. But how correct is this assumption?

It was Fazlur Raḥmān (d. 1988) of Chicago who dared to challenge the Muslim 'orthodoxy' on this assumption. He argued that there was no Muslim consensus during the second and third centuries of Islam on the nature of revelation. In fact, quite the opposite was true, "acute differences of opinion" had arisen among Muslims on this question. Interestingly, Raḥmān, attributes the cause of this controversy to the rival Christian doctrines of revelation which were prevalent at the time (Raḥmān 1966:31).

It was as a result of this challenging context that the emerging Muslim 'orthodoxy', which was at the time in the crucial stage of formulating its precise content, emphasized the externality of the Prophet's revelation in order to safeguard its 'otherness', objectivity and verbal character (ibid).

Rahmān however did not merely provide us with greater clarity as to how the 'orthodox' Muslim doctrine developed, but ventured to challenge it by proposing a theory of revelation that combined the verbal character of the revelation with the religious personality of the Prophet. A combination which he argues the Qur'ān itself affirms, 'for it insists that it has come to the 'heart' of the Prophet (Q. 26:194 and 2:97). How then can it be external to him? (ibid).

The nett-result of Rahmān's controversial theory of revelation was that he argued that according to the Qur'ān 43:51-52, "God speaks to no human (i.e. through sound-words) except through wahy (i.e. through idea-word inspiration)". The Qur'ān then according to Rahman is the Word of God, but by 'Word' (kalām) he does not mean sound. Essentially what Rahmān is saying is that the Qur'ān which is the end product of revelation is the idea-words of God, expressed in the sound-words of Muḥammad (ibid).

William A. Graham's thesis of the mode and meaning of early revelation has gone beyond Rahman's analysis of the historical development of the 'orthodox' Muslim doctrine of revelation a step further (Graham 1977:9-48).

The results he has come up with have been profound, to say the least. Graham's findings challenge many traditionally held perceptions of the early history of the Qur'ān. We shall now briefly present a summary of Grahams' major findings.

1. His thesis is based on the idea that the "cutting off" of revelation at the Prophet's death marks not only the end of one historical order and the beginning of another, but also the transition from one order of being to another.

2. Focussing on the literal words -'revelation was cut off' (inn-l-wahy gad inqata'a) - used by the closest companions of the Prophet Muhammad whenever they described the conclusion of the Prophetic era, Graham argues that wahy is to be understood here 'as an activity coextensive with the life bearer of revelation, the Prophet', rather than as a synonym for 'book' or 'scripture'. He backs this up by pointing out that the verbal noun wahy, only began to be used as a concrete noun referring to a text rather than an event comparatively late.

3. In the earliest period, according to Graham, revelation was seen to be an activity of God mediated by His messenger Muhammad explicitly in divine 'recitations', or qur'āns, and implicitly in his own words and actions to his people, and even in the example and witness of all who participated in the sacred history of the Prophet's time. All these dimensions of the divine activity was seen as complementary and integral aspects of a single phenomenon called wahy/revelation.

4. Graham concludes that the earlier Muslims had a much broader interpretation of revelation than was later the case. Moreover, they had less fixed notions of the boundaries of the Qur'anic corpus itself and the boundaries of the divine word and prophetic word were much more loosely defined.

5. This more 'open' and 'broader' understanding of revelation was transformed when the separate qur'āns that had been revealed to the Prophet were brought together "between two covers" (bayn-ad-daffatayn) by 'Uthmanic redactors some twenty years after the Prophet's death.

Graham's concept of viewing the separate 'recitations' of the piecemeal revelations as qur'āns, was first developed by Bell and Montgomery Watt (ibid). John Bowman (1980) has proposed that this concept appears to be fully congruent with that of the lectionary recitations of the Syriac Qaryane of the Nestorians during their Sunday Eucharist services (Bowman 1980:29-35).

In terms of this lectionary practise developed by the Jews, the Syriac Holy Scriptures were divided into a number of separate books. It was rare for the manuscripts of the Syriac Holy Scriptures to be bound up into one volume. The Law (Syriac Uraitha) tended to be in one volume, the Prophets in another and the Psalms in still another, and the Gospels, Acts and Pauline epistles in still yet another. It would be interesting to examine how similar the manuscripts of the earlier qur'āns before its cannonization into one volume during the time of 'Uthmān was to that of the Syriac Qaryane and even Jewish lectionary scriptures floating around in the Arabian Peninsula at the time of the Prophetic era. Already we know that the Arabic word Qur'ān and the Syriac Qaryane are akin. Bowman has also proposed that the Qur'ān came to serve the same liturgical function as the Syriac Kitaba d'Qaryane (ibid).

It is clear from our discussion thusfar that revelation in Islam is a far more complex phenomenon than the simplistic and romantic understandings developed by the Muslim orthodoxy. The latter's perception was formulated during the third and fourth centuries of Islam. It contrasts significantly from the more 'open' and 'dynamic' concept of revelation of the preceding period. Graham has divided this period into two sub-periods. The Prophetic era in which revelation was proceeding which he calls 'sacred time'. And the transition period immediately following this, which lasted for about two centuries, he describes as the pre-theological period.

All of the research findings we have examined thusfar, ranging from Husayn and Ayoub through to Raḥmān, Graham and Bowman, point to novel and challenging ways of re-acquainting ourselves with the phenomenon of revelation in Islām, and more significantly in a comparative perspective. But does this provide us with a viable way out of the present impasse that the debate on tahrīf has reached?

Husayn's suggested difference between the Muslim and Christian modes of revelation leads to the conclusion of incommensurability between the two, such that we can accept the difference. For Muslims he pleads that they accept the Christian scriptures as such, and approach them with caution. Such a position does not however provide us with a real way out of the impasse. It is doubtful that any serious Christian will accept such a devalued appreciation of his or her sacred scriptures.

Moreover, it will not in anyway lead to a reduction in the Muslim charge of tahrīf against the Bible. If anything, it will give them a firmer basis for arguing for the rejection of the authenticity of the Bible.

Ayoub distinguishes between the "revelation of action" (wahy al-'amal) of Islam and the "revelation of the word" (wahy al-kalimah) of Christianity. Unlike Ayoub who proceeds from a traditional Muslim viewpoint of revelation, Raḥmān takes a radical Muslim viewpoint and proposes a Muslim revelation of action which is equivalent to that of Christianity. Graham supports Raḥmān by stressing the word-nature of Muslim revelation, though not denying its action-nature dimension. This more integrative and dynamic perception of Muslim revelation can reconcile itself fully with the non-fundamentalist mainline Judaeo-Christian concepts of revelation. With this new understanding of the differing modes of revelation, our concept of tahrīf takes on an entirely new meaning. Tahrīf within this context can be seen as part of the active relationship between Muslims and the Jews and Christians in seventh century Arabia. It essentially means distortions in the interpretation and implementation of the Divine message. The Tunisian based Islamic scholar Dr. Muḥammad Talbi, has offered us with the following refined definition of tahrīf which we believe fully conforms to the position we have argued for thusfar.

"Tahrīf is the deviation suffered by the divine ray when it passes through the deforming prism of our imperfect humanity" (The Challenge of the Scriptures 1989:78).

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing analysis it becomes clear that Ibn Ḥazm had elaborated upon an extreme and literal interpretation of the Muslim doctrine of tahrīf. In his judgement, both the Jews as well as the Christians are accused of having willfully corrupted the original divine texts of their sacred scriptures (tahrīf al-naṣṣ).

The irreverent style with which Ibn Ḥazm makes his claim of tahrīf al-naṣṣ has prompted us to investigate not only the social and intellectual milieu out of which he emerged, but also the complex psychological basis of his writings.

The reviling language that Ibn Ḥazm employs in our judgement can be characterized as nothing less than blasphemy. In this regard Ibn Ḥazm sadly violates his own commitment to the noble teachings and values of the Qur'ān, which exhorts its readers to argue with kindness and in a loving manner without reviling anything that other people hold sacred (6:108).

Nevertheless, Ibn Ḥazm employed a unique method in reaching his conclusions. Asin Palacios, Abu Layla and Aasi have proposed that Ibn Ḥazm's literary analysis and rational critique of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures, resembles the criteria of the historical-critical method employed by the founders of modern Biblical criticism (Abu Layla 1985:92; Aasi 1987:98). In this sense then, Ibn Ḥazm can be attributed to being the precursor of modern critical Biblical scholarship.

Although there exists an overall consistency in Ibn Ḥazm's position on tahrif al-nass, he becomes, at times, over-zealous in proving his point and accepts the authenticity of some Biblical passages but provides a completely new interpretation to them. On these occasions, Ibn Ḥazm lapses into the opposing view out of tahrif al-ma'ani. He justifies such expediency by arguing that God protected those parts of the Injil that He wished to stand as a testimony against corruption, and as proof of the truthfulness of Islam (al-Fisal, Vol. 2:11).

Abu Layla has corrected al-Tarjumān's view that Ibn Ḥazm tended to rely upon reason rather than text. (Abu Layla 1985:91) Firstly, Ibn Ḥazm saw no real tension between reason and revelation and secondly, Ibn Ḥazm's Zāhirī or literalist theory was totally dependant on textual evidence and its analysis. He applied his literalist exegesis on the Qur'an to that of the Torah and the four Gospels. Moreover, it is his literalist reading of the Qur'anic passages pertaining to tahrif and its related terms that prompted Ibn Ḥazm to undertake his rigorous study of the religious scriptures of Jews and Christians. Ibn Ḥazm made the following Qur'anic passage his basic criterion for testing the divine origin of any scripture and its historical preservation and authenticity:

"Will they not, then, try to understand this Qur'ān?
Had it issued from any but God, they would surely
have found in it many an inner contradiction" (4:82).

This study has shown that at least two of the major classical commentators of the Qur'ān, Ṭabari and Rāzi, do not share Ibn Ḥazm's literalist and emphatic interpretations of tahrif. Rāzi,

on the contrary, is not convinced that the Qur'ān supports a doctrine of tahrīf al-naṣṣ, and categorically affirms that the texts of the Torah and the Gospels have not been corrupted.

This study has however not merely critiqued Ibn Ḥazm's traditional methodology in constructing his doctrine of tahrīf al-naṣṣ. It has attempted to go beyond that, and searched for new theories in dealing with the question tahrīf. A number of new and creative theories of revelation were examined. We have concluded that a novel and dynamic conception of Muslim revelation, which integrates both the emphasized word-nature (wahy al-kalimah) as well as its action nature (wahī al-ʿamal) dimension, does provide us with a viable way out of the present impasse that the debate on tahrīf has reached.

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